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PATRIOTISM,

A CHRISTIAN VIRTUE.

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REV. JOSEPH FRANSIOLI, AT ST. PETER'S (CATHOLIC) CHURCH, BROOKLYN, JULY 26TH, 1863.

"When Jesus drew near Jerusalem, seeing the City, he wept over it."—*Luke.*

These words of the Gospel of this Sunday bring to our contemplation a fact, that is wonderfully significant in the present circumstances of our country. The Gospel has recorded only two instances in which our Holy Redeemer shed tears,—once at the tomb of Lazarus, his friend, and once at the sight of Jerusalem, the capital of his country.

Neither the persecutions of the magistrates, the calumnies of the Scribes and Pharisees, the ingratitude of the people, the insults and tortures of the soldiers—not even the denial of Peter or the treason of Judas, ever caused a single tear to drop from the merciful eyes of Jesus.

But when the body of his friend appears decaying in the grave, and the future irreparable destruction of his motherland is brought to his mind in sight of the capital of that unfortunate country, then his tender affection, overpowered so to speak, moves him to weep. What a lesson for us is contained in this extraordinary event! Christ weeps over Jerusalem, because, in

time to come, the magnificent city shall be levelled to the ground, and with it the whole country destroyed, and the whole nation swept from the surface of the earth. He weeps because he loves his country; he weeps because his countrymen do not withstand the criminal cause of the impending disaster. Hence patriotism is not only a social virtue, commanding respect, but a *christian virtue*, to be rewarded by the blessings of God here and hereafter. On this noble subject I will speak to you, proposing two points:

1st. To love our country is our duty as men and Christians.

2d. How must we show our love towards our country?

1st. Man is naturally so born for society that he could not exist, grow and prosper alone. His first society is the family. Private families are the members of the great human family. The immense human family is subdivided by geographical positions and conventional arrangements into several families or societies, called nations; all nations are governed by certain fundamental laws and additional regulations, directed to protect all the members in their property and their lives, and to promote their welfare. All men born in, or by their own choice belonging to a nation, and enjoying under the laws of the land the blessings of all kinds emanating from them, are citizens or children of the national family or motherland. The duty of loving her stands on the same principle as the duty of a member of loving his family, and of a child of loving its mother. In fact, our motherland, the place of our birth or of our adoption, with an affection that we hardly appreciate, opening her maternal bosom, feeds us in our hunger, refreshes us in our thirst, clothes us, and takes all cares of our welfare. Hence the duty of loving her imposed upon us by nature is loudly proclaimed by the history of mankind. There, shame is recorded for cowards, traitors and tyrants; there, honors and benedictions are poured out over the faithful and generous lover of his country. Visit all nations, whether barbarous or civilized, travel all over the earth, and everywhere you shall meet traditions and inscriptions immortalizing patriotic deeds, and monuments erected to true patriots, by the instinctive gratitude of the nations to per-

petuate to posterity the memory of those noble citizens, as well as to enkindle in the hearts of all, love to their country. Deny the duty of loving your country, and you deny your own feelings; you deny mankind itself. Deny the duty of loving your country, and, I say it emphatically, you reap contempt and execration.

2d. But, if to love our country is a duty, it is also a virtue; for virtue is nothing else than the performance of our duties, and the value of any virtue is measured by the degree of punctuality and purity shown in fulfilling our duties.

This duty of loving our country, which nature and society impose upon us, is more strictly enforced by Christian Catholic religion. As Christian Catholics, we are followers of Christ. He came on earth Reformer and Redeemer, not to dissolve the national and social duties, but to encourage and help us to their more perfect fulfillment. A Catholic that loves not his country does not understand his religion.

Take the Holy Scriptures, which is the book of Christianity and Catholicity; look from beginning to end over those pages, and see that no one is celebrated there as a saint or a great man who was not at once faithful to his God and ever affectionate to his country. What were the Patriarchs but the founders of the Jewish nationality? Who was Moses? The great legislator and patriot, who, with an excess of confidence in his God, could say to Him: "Or suspend Thy punishment against my people, or blot me out of the book of life." All the Judges who followed Moses, like Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, were they not all distinguished patriots? Who, among the kings, ranks greater and more glorious than those who spent their lives for the benefit of their people, and, of the stock of David, the most popular and valiant of all the Hebrew monarchs, Jesus Christ was born in the fullness of time. This great Redeemer of mankind was expected as the Redeemer of his nation, to which he paid the tribute, and was so faithful, so liberal, and so affectionate, that to-day he is represented weeping for the disasters impending over it. The apostles, the zealous missionaries of Christ, commenced their labors in their native country. There, first, they developed their power, their charity, their heroism. Tell me

whether, among the holy Fathers who are the representatives of the golden times of Christianity, you can find one who was not a patriot? Read the ecclesiastical history, and from Ambrose —that refuses entrance into the temple to Theodosious, guilty of the blood of his people—down to the humble friar Anthony of Padova, who rebuked the cruelties of Ezelino, the tyrant of Lombardy, you shall not find one saint that was not, at the same time, a patriot. You find here and there patriots who were not, and are not, saints, but you shall seek in vain for a Catholic saint that was not a patriot.

Do you know the great change effected by Christian religion in connection with nationalities? The abolition of the principle of sacrificing the nation to the individual, and the establishment of the stupendous system of sacrificing the individualities to the nation. Hence, according to the spirit of Catholicity, we must love our neighbors as ourselves, our family more than our neighbor, our country more than our family, and our God alone more than our country. Hence, our Saviour, who was a Galilean born in Bethlehem, and residing in Nazareth, in foreseeing the disasters of his country, wept not in sight of Bethlehem or approaching Nazareth, but when he drew near Jerusalem, the capital of his country, he wept then and there. Hence, the national rights and integrity must be dearer to the Christian patriot than any other individual right; consequently must sound extremely painful to the ears of a patriot the theories of certain citizens, who favor the intervention of foreign powers in our national affairs, and deny to the national authorities all interference in the affairs of the States of the nation.

In accordance with the principles above stated, the duty of loving our country becomes more sacred and expansive in proportion to the blessings that one enjoys from his motherland. A country whose institutions provide equally for the welfare of all classes; where the laws are enacted by the majority of the people, to suit the general interest; where opportunities are offered to all citizens to develop their abilities, to apply their mental and physical powers, and raise themselves to a high respectability; where the land is redundant with all kinds of products, and offers inexhaustible resources of wealth and grandeur; a country of such description, and offering such advantages

to all, without distinction of birth or class, such a country must naturally command the most tender affection. Now, if we apply these theories to our own case, how dearly should we, American citizens, love this wonderful country, the greatest, the richest on earth, the glorious shelter of mankind. And, indeed, individually I know thousands who love this country most affectionately, but, collectively taken, the people do not love the country as they should. O may they love her as much as she deserves!

How must we show our love towards our country? The answer to this question embraces the second point proposed for your consideration, and I answer:

1st. By loving the institutions of our country. Hence we must study them, to understand and appreciate them as the most wonderful conception and work of political wisdom. Then we must support them, and, with all means in our power, we must try to extend their beneficent influences. Forget not, that these institutions lose not only their beautiful architype of symmetry and harmony, but even their efficiency of action if secondary interests are allowed to prevail over the general interest of the American Union. Forget not, that such institutions are the creation and voluntary choice of the people, and that the people must stand by them with inexorable respect and indomitable tenacity. When a building of classical architecture is threatened with ruin by accidents or age, the efforts of the architect superintending the work of reconstruction are concentrated to preserve the general character and design. Bear in mind forever the comparison.

2d. By respecting and loving one another, without any regard to difference of religious creed or political opinion. Prejudices must be removed; we are all brothers, all children of the same mother.

To say that Puritans, or Catholics, cannot be good patriots, is a deplorable error, contradicted on our side by centuries of glorious patriots all over the earth, and in this country refuted by streams of blood and numberless lives sacrificed to the Union on the fields of battles by heroic Catholic patriotism.

Let us only be just and tolerant, and we shall not have reason to blame one another, but reasons to forgive one another.

If there are wicked and foolish among us, we do not endorse them, because our religion teaches us to be good and wise Christians, good and wise citizens. If we should appeal to the innocent to throw the first stone against the guilty one, who would dare to strike the first blow?

3d. We must love our country by obeying the laws of our country and standing by the authorities or Government, not as a party, but as a principle. Except in case that the laws of the country and the orders of the lawful authorities were in opposition to the laws of God, we are always bound to obey; Christ obeyed the laws of his country, paid the tribute, and gave command to render Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and yet the Cæsars of his time were not the choice of the people, but imposed and forced upon the people. How much more must we respect the authorities of our country, which in a legal manner, by the vote of the people, are constituted?

The apostles obeyed the laws of the country, wherever they were, not conflicting with their own Divine mission.

St. Paul, as a Roman citizen, appealed to the Roman law and tribunal. And when the primitive Christians were accused by the Romans as a dangerous set of people, inimical to the country, because they constantly refused to obey the orders of sacrificing to the pagan deities, St. Paul came forward to refute the accusation and to establish the Christian doctrine upon the important subject. Take the XIII. chapter of his epistle to the Romans: "Let every soul to be subject to higher powers; for "there is no power but from God, and that those that are, are "ordained of God; therefore he that resisteth the power resist- "eth the ordinance of God, and they that resist purchase to "themselves damnation. For princes (the authorities) are not a "terror to the good work, but to the evil. Will thou then not "be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou "shalt have praise from the same: for he is God's minister to "thee for good, wherefore be subject of necessity not only for "wrath, but also for conscience sake."

But I have heard citizens object to this doctrine of the apostle by saying that, when the law is unjust and unconstitutional and

the administration corrupt there then arises the right of revolution admitted by all statesmen. I answer. If the law is unjust, in the sense that it interferes with your duties of a higher sphere, that is to say your duties towards God and your conscience, then the martyrs of Christendom teach you how to deal with it, lay down your life in confirmation of your faith, without any violent resistance. When the Emperor Maxamilian ordered his army in crossing the Alps to sacrifice to the idols; six thousand and six hundred christian soldiers left their ranks, declaring it to be sacriligious for them to adore false deities. They retired from the rest of the army. To this declaration, the answer of the emperor was an order to a large detachment of the army to decimate the disobedient soldiers. Upon hearing such an atrocious command, the noble soldiers of the Theban Legion led by their Chieftain Morrisa, who fought always bravely against the enemies of the country, as to deserve the name of the legion of heroes, laid down their arms, and offered their heads, and one after the other all were barbarously executed, but gave no resistance, although with the arms in their hands, and with their union and valor, they could easily have defended their right.

If the law is unjust, in the sense that it is against the constitution, you have the legal means to obtain redress to your grievances. Never any right of revolution can be sanctioned, but in case that all the legal means were exhausted in vain, and that the oppression lasted so long, and was so politically murderous as to cause desolation and despair. Revolution was never supported even by European statesmen, but for the purpose of shaking off foreign tyrannical dominion to reconstruct dismembered nationalities, never to destroy them. A revolution to destroy the motherland, or the nation, is an atrocious absurdity—a parricide.

Finally, we must love our country by supporting her existence, and promoting her welfare with all means in our power. In prosperous times let us enjoy peacefully and thankfully her blessings, and in times of trouble and danger, let us rush to her rescue.

The true Christian patriot brings before the altar of his country, his property and his life cheerfully ready for the sacrifice when it is demanded. What kind of friends are those

who love their friends only in time of prosperity, and abandon them in time of adversity? What kind of children are those who love their parents and relatives only, when peace, health and plenty cheer the house, and desert it in time of sickness and affliction? Does not the noble mother love more her child when it is ill and poor? Does not the good son feel more attachment to his parents when suffering and dying? Does not the doctrine and examples of Christ teach us that he loved the sufferers and wept over the impending disasters of his country? If the coming destruction of a country is worth the tears of Jesus, what shall the troubles, the dangers of our own country demand from us? Here I conclude my discourse, and say to you my dearly-beloved friends: these are times of trials, of dangers, of self-denial. Instead of losing our time in merciless criticism, in querulous complaint, in criminal insinuation of resistance to the authorities lawfully constituted, let us study the book of our own troubles with tears in our eyes, with wisdom in our mind, with fortitude in our hearts.

Let us learn the lesson of the tears of Christ, for fear that one day to come he should reproach us with having not *known the time of our visitation.*